

Cass Abrahams

Retired chef, food historian, cookbook author, Cape cuisine expert and lover of landline telephones

Where I live has impacted on the food I make.

I'm a 77-year-old lady from Cape Town and believe there's no such thing as Cape Malay food – it's African food infused with dishes from other cultures. As time went by, nations that settled in the Cape took African food and added their own touches. The food I cook serves a purpose. When it comes to heritage and tradition, for example, I always make pickled fish on Good Friday. Simple.

My favourite traditional dish is 'denningvleis', a South African lamb stew with mixed spice marinade. It was the first printed recipe in SA, brought to the Cape by slaves from Indonesia and Bali. These slaves worked in their masters' kitchens and developed the recipe for themselves with spices bought from ships that docked at the Cape. The dish has great health benefits; some of the spices have antioxidants and some protect the body from infections.

It's important to preserve our culinary heritage because food traces the history of a nation.

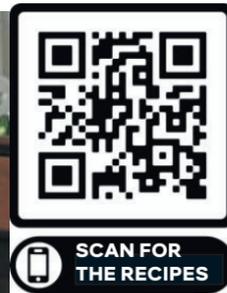
Many of our recipes originated from the Koi-San and were adopted by the Dutch who visited the Cape. Some were taken overseas, where they were changed to become part of other peoples' cuisine. The old ladies in my community passed the history of our food on to me orally. I wrote the recipes down and tried them. If we don't record the history of our food we'll lose it. For example, bobotie is an old recipe that comes from Indonesia. That variation is called *bobotok* and was wrapped and cooked in banana leaves. Cape slaves added fruits and spices to the dish. The Dutch included ground beef, giving us the modern version.

Heritage impacts our food and drinks. There are many Muslim people in the Cape, which means the bulk of the recipes developed here don't include alcohol.

Instagram: Who is Instagram?



Cass Abrahams, above, and her dhall curry. PICTURES: NEW FRAME/ BARRY CHRISTIANSON



SCAN FOR THE RECIPES



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Jonathan Nel

Head Chef at Gemelli, in Bryanston, Joburg

I was born in Benoni to a Dutch mother and an Afrikaans father and grew up with hearty meals and ample braais.

These experiences played a role in my cooking because of an emotional connection to food. Charred or sweet and savoury flavours, my heritage pops up on my plates.

My favourite traditional food is anything off the braai. Growing up, it represented family, friends and togetherness. Those inherited experiences give me a satisfying feeling and



Jonathan Nel's modern Caprese salad. PICTURES: JOSHUA ROGERS
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give me something to look forward to. The health benefits of braai meat include protein, blood sugar control and increased brain function. Vegetables can also be braaied and have good benefits.

It's important to preserve our traditional culinary offerings to ensure satisfaction for those who consume our food. A great chef can pull off adding emotion to a dish, bringing traditional elements into fine dining, which honours our heritage.

The fact that I'm old school makes me unique as a chef. Hard work, long hours, discipline and a thick skin are my foundations in the kitchen. I reinvent classics with a quirky, comedic twist, so creativity is one of my assets. Through mentors I've learnt that adding as much flavour as possible without overpowering the dish is vital, so I implement that principle in everything. I don't like short cuts. I study ingredients to find the best way to impart maximum flavour using methods like slow cooking.

Instagram: @gemelli_restaurant

Verushka Ramasami

Chef, lecturer in hospitality and tourism

I'm a South African of Indian origin, based in Durban – a melting pot of SA's food culture. My food heritage continues to be inspired by both my Indian and African roots, which packs a spicy punch. Growing up, I learnt about different cultures and their food by visiting people's houses and going to



Verushka Ramasami's samp and beans, Durban style. PICTURE: SALMA PATEL
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restaurants. When I went to the UK for nine years to teach food technology I learnt about food from Iran, Asia, Turkey, Palestine, Lebanon and other parts of the world. Even within the Indian community in London the food heritage from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Punjab was celebrated. SA must retain the food heritage and embrace the customs of other cultures.

My favourite traditional dish is samp and beans – a typical recipe in Indian homes. There are a number of variations. People with different heritages cook it but the Indian twist is in the spices and the meat we use, like mutton. It's a "rainbow nation" dish. Samp and beans are high in protein. Even without meat it's a nutritional and fully balanced meal. It's also cost-effective and can feed large families.

It's important to preserve our culinary heritages to leave a legacy for generations to come. Travelling abroad, I've learnt to appreciate the food of our rainbow nation. Dishes like chakalaka, bunny chow and shisanyama are part of being South African. In food, we have a lot more in common than we realise. Our spirit of ubuntu and caring for others comes through our recipes.

What makes me unique is that I'm a 'fusion cook', creating recipes from memory and from my childhood and bringing in new ingredients. My training taught me to understand how foods mix together and the role of spices. I bring my travels into my cooking, adding a twist to older dishes.

Instagram: @spicegoddess_eats and @spicegoddessblog